

XXIX.

MEMOIRS

OF

LITERATURE.

MONDAY, September 25. 1710.

I.

LUCII CECILII liber ad Donatum Confessorem, de mortibus Persecutorum, hactenus Caelio Firmiano Lactantio ascriptus, ad Colbertinum Codicem denuò emendatus. Accessit Dissertatio, in qua de hujus libri Auctore disputatur, & omnia illius loca dubia, difficilia, obscura, variaeque Auctoris Opiniones examinantur, explicantur, illustrantur, studio & opera D. Nicolai le Nourry Presbyteri & Monachi Ord. S. Benedicti à Congregatione S. Mauri.

That is, *The Book of Lucius Cecilius concerning the Death of the Persecutors, hitherto ascribed to Lactantius; corrected from the Manuscript in M. Colbert's Library, by Father D. Nicolas le Nourry, a Benedictin Monk of the Congregation of St. Maur: With a Dissertation concerning the true Author of that Work, wherein the Editor explains the difficult Passages of his Author, and enquires into his Opinions.* Paris, 1710. in 8vo. pagg. 403. Besides the Preface and the Tables.

ALL the Learned know how carefully M. Colbert endeavoured to enrich his Library with the most valuable, and most ancient Manuscripts. This was sent to him by M. Foucault, who found it with several others in the Abbey of Moissac. M. Baluze, who had then the Direction of that Library, having examined it, took it to be a Piece of *Lactantius*, and publish'd it in the Year 1679. under the Name of that Author. This Book was received with great Applause, and quickly reprinted in England, Sweden, and Holland. But because the last Editions were only publish'd from that of M. Baluze, for the Editors did not see the Manuscript, which is the only one extant; and because the first Edition is grown scarce, Father le Nourry thought the Learned wou'd be

well pleased to have a new one, exactly corrected from the Original. Two other Reasons moved him more powerfully to execute his Design. 1. He pretends that the Learned have not sufficiently examin'd, whether this Book was written by *Lactantius*. 2. He believes that those, who took care of the Editions, that came out after the first, made an ill use of the Authority of that Writer to confirm their Opinions in Matters of Religion.

The Readers will find, in the first Place, the Text of that Author, revised and corrected from M. Colbert's Manuscript. The Editor has inserted all the various Readings, even those that appear'd to him of little Moment; but he has done it, that the true ones might be more easily found out. He has also carefully observed the *hiatus*, that are on the Edges of the Manuscript, which have been torn or worn out by Time; that the Readers may judge of the Conjectures of those, who undertook to fill them up. And to shew the Nature and Antiquity of that Manuscript, the first Page has been engraved, and is to be seen here such as it is in the Original.

Next to the Text there is a Dissertation, wherein 1. The Editor clears the obscure Passages. He endeavours to find out the true Opinions of his Author. He builds his Conjectures upon the Authority of Contemporary Writers, and answers the Objections that may be raised against him. 2. He proceeds to examine the Manuscript, and pretends that it was written by a Man, who committed abundance of Mistakes, because he did not understand the *Latin* Tongue. He observes that this Work does not answer the Title, since the Author is very short in what he says of the first Persecutors; and on the contrary, very much enlarges upon *Diocletian* and his Successors. He undertakes to find out the Reasons, that moved the Author to write that Book, and the Time when he went about it. 3. Father le Nourry enquires whether *Lactantius* is the true Author of this Book, as 'tis generally believed. He is of another Opinion: The Title of the Book, wherein the Name of *Lactantius* does not appear, the Argument, and the Subject of the Work, have convinced him that this is a different Book from that, which St. Je-

rome ascribes to *Lactantius* under this Title, *De Persecutione*; and he says that *Donatus*, to whom it is inscribed, is not the same Person, to whom *Lactantius* inscribed his Book, *De Ira Dei*. This Work, says he, is written in a Style different from that of *Lactantius*, and contains many particular Opinions inconsistent with those of that Ancient Writer. 4. The Editor gives an Account of the several Editions of that Book. The first was publish'd at *Paris* in 1679. by M. *Baluze*, who ingenuously confesses in his Preface, that having found the Manuscript full of Faults, he only mended those, that cou'd easily be mended, leaving the Care of mending the rest to those, who were learned and bold enough to undertake it. The Second Edition came out at *Oxford* in 1680. and was procured by Dr. *Fell* Bishop of that City. This Work was publish'd the same Year in *French* at *Paris* by M. de *Maucroix*, Abbot of *St. Hilary*, and Canon of *Rheims*.

In 1684. Mr. *Thomas Spark* publish'd all the Works of *Lactantius*, and added this Piece at the end. In the same Year M. *John Columbus* did the same at *Abo* in *Sweden*. The Year following, that Piece was printed at *Cambridge* with the other Works of *Lactantius*. M. *Baudri* publish'd it at *Utrecht* in 1692. It had been before translated into *English* by Dr. *Burnet*, now Lord Bishop of *Sarum*; and the *French* Version, which came out at *Utrecht* in 1687. was made from the *English* Translation. Father *le Nourry* mentions all those Editions for no other Reason, but to shew the Readers what Alterations have been made in that Work by those different Editors. He examines their Notes, and pretends to confute all those, wherein they undertook to prove that this Author does not Favour the Doctrines of the Church of *Rome*.

1. What *Lucius Cecilius* says of the Time and the Day when *Christ* died, does not agree with what we read about it in *Lactantius*. The Editor, who makes this Observation, pretends that some have vainly endeavoured to prove that these Words, *post diem decimum Kal. April.* signify the same thing as *ante diem septimum aut decimum Aprilis*. Afterwards he examines, whether the Author says that *St. Peter* did not come to *Rome* but under the Empire of *Nero*.

2. Speaking of Meats offer'd to Idols, he endeavours to find out who was the first Emperor, who order'd that no Meat should be sold, before it had been presented to the false Gods. He mentions the extraordinary Torments, which a Martyr endured, for tearing the Edict of *Diocletian*; and pretends, that there is no Reason to maintain, against *Eusebius's* Opinion, that this Martyr was an obscure Man.

3. Discouraging of the Power, which the Primitive Christians exerted against the Devils with the Sign of the Cross; he confutes those, who believe that the Sign of the Cross, which appear'd to *Constantine*, was only a Stratagem of War, invented by that Emperor to encourage his Soldiers; or a natural Phenomenon, or perhaps a mere Fiction. In the next place, he

observes that the Primitive Christians had not only several Temples and Churches, but also some Lands; and that *Lucius Cecilius* speaks of Meritorious Works.

He proceeds to consider what the Author says concerning the Death of the Persecutors. He examines, in the first place, whether the first Persecution was rais'd by *Nero*; Whether that Emperor persecuted the Church on account of *St. Peter's* Preaching; Whether the Body of *Nero* was buried after his Death; What gave Occasion to believe that he is to be a Forerunner of *Antichrist*; and whether it be true, as *Lucius Cecilius* says, that the Church enjoy'd a continual Peace, from the Death of *Domitian* to the Reign of the Emperor *Decius*. The Editor makes several Observations upon what his Author says of the Vices of *Diocletian*; of his Dividing the Empire, and of his Prosperity till he began to persecute the Christians: And then he enlarges upon the Fury of that Persecution. He examines its Rise, and its Progress: He dwells upon the most Considerable Events; such as the Destruction of the Church of *Nicomedia*, the famous Edict publish'd against the Christians, the Death of the Wife and Daughter of that Emperor, and his Eagerness in persuading the other Emperors to persecute the Church.

Diocletian went to *Rome*, to Celebrate the Twentieth Year of his Reign: But not being able to bear the Insults of the People, he retired to *Ravenna*, where he had a Fit of a Disease, which at first appear'd to him inconsiderable. But perceiving that it grew worse, he resolv'd to leave *Ravenna*, and repaired to *Nicomedia per circuitum Ripæ Strigæ*. Father *le Nourry* endeavours to explain those Words, which have very much exercised the Learned.

The Fatigue of the Journey increased *Diocletian's* Illness to such a Degree, that he was oblig'd to appear in Publick, because there went a general Report that he was dead. He continued to be very Ill: *Galerius* came to him at *Nicomedia*, and having had a Conference with him, oblig'd him to resign the Empire. *Lucius Cecilius* relates that Conversation at large. Father *le Nourry* finds many doubtful Circumstances in it; and does not believe what the Author says of *Diocletian's* Weakness, Groans, and Tears. Several Historians tell us that *Diocletian* laid down the Imperial Dignity of his own accord; and that he would not resume it, when it was offer'd him. He also suspects the Truth of what is said in that Dialogue concerning the Insolence of *Galerius*, and the Presence of *Constantine* the Great; nor does he give any Credit to *Cecilius* in what he says of *Diocletian's* Death: That Account appears to him inconsistent with the Relation of other Authors.

Father *le Nourry* examines afterwards, whether *Prisca*, *Diocletian's* Wife, and his Daughter *Valeria*, were Christians, as some believe. He discovers the Reasons why *Valeria* refused to marry *Maximinus*, and why that Emperor resolv'd to put her to Death with her Mother, and some other Women, for whom she had a Friendship.

SOME

II.

SOME Critical Remarks upon a Passage in the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil, Communicated to the Author of these Memoirs, by Dr. B * * in a Conversation.

VIRGIL describes a New Age, which was then beginning; and among the Wonders of those Happy Times, he observes that there would be no more any need of Dying Cloaths; and that Sheep would naturally have all manner of beautiful Colours on their Fleeces; some Purple, some Scarlet, others Yellow, &c.

*Nec varios disceat mentiri lana colores:
Ipse sed in pratis aries jam suave rubenti
Murice, jam croceo mutabit vellera luto:
Sponte sua SANDYX PASCENTES vestiet*
[agnos. Vers. 42. & seq.]

Such is the Reading of all the Copies now extant, which has prevail'd ever since *Vespasian's* Time; as it appears from *Pliny* the Elder, in the XXXVth Book of his Natural History, Chap. VI. where speaking of the *Sandyx*, or *Sandarach*, a mineral Pigment, he adds; *Quaquam animadverto Virgilium existimasse herbam id esse, illo versu:*

Sponte sua Sandyx pascentes vestiet agnos.

When he says that *Virgil* took the *Sandyx* to be an Herb, and not a Mineral, he argues from the Word *PASCENTES*, which can mean nothing else, but that the Lambs, browsing upon the *Sandyx*, shou'd receive the Dye in their Fleeces from that Aliment. And so *Servius*, the Ancient Commentator, understood it. *Sandyx herba est*, says he, *de qua tingitur Sandycinus color.* The Greek Version of *Virgil's* Words in *Eusebius*, *de Vita Constantini*, is so loose and unaccurate, that no body can guess whether that Translator read *PASCENTES*, or not.

The Herb *Sandyx* is a mere Fiction: Such a Plant was unknown to all the Ancient Naturalists, and to *Pliny* himself; as it plainly appears from this very Passage. And therefore some Moderns, to vindicate *Virgil*, have found fault with *Pliny* for drawing this Inference, that the Poet took the *Sandyx* to be a Plant.

But in this they shew no great Judgment: For if *Virgil* did not take it so, to what purpose did he use the Word *PASCENTES*? Why must the Lambs take the Dye only when they are FEEDING? Why not also, when they are Resting in the Shade? Why not at Night, while they are in the Sheepfolds? Whoever admits of the Reading *PASCENTES*, feeding, must allow that *Sandyx* was the Food of the Lambs; or else that Circumstance is wholly impertinent, and even absurd.

We have Reason therefore to be displeased with the Word *PASCENTES*, which necessarily involves the most Learned of Poets in that unhappy Mistake of an Herb for a Mineral.

But the worst of all is, that even allowing *Sandyx* to be a Plant, and calling *Hesychius* to the Poet's Assistance, who defines *Sandyx*, *Ἰνδρον Σαυδάρις*, a shrubby Tree, that has a Flower of Scarlet Colour; yet the Word *PASCENTES* lies open to so many Objections, that we must either find a better, or leave our Poet under a Censure very injurious to his great Reputation.

For, 1. Supposing the *Sandyx* to be a Plant; yet if the Lambs took that Tincture only *pascetes*, by feeding on it, no Italian Lambs cou'd have that Dye on their Fleeces: For 'tis plain from *Pliny*, that Plant did not grow in Italy, if it grew any where at all. And then, what will become of the Compliment to *Pollio's* Son, or to *Augustus*, who lived in Italy? 'Tis true, this Objection may be in some measure answered by the Fiction of a preceding Miracle, Vers. 39. *Omnis feret omnia Tellus.*

2. By the Description of this Supposed Plant, *Ἰνδρον Σαυδάρις*, it is most likely that Sheep do not feed upon it at all: And that Food is still more improperly assign'd to the LAMBS, than if it had been to the grown SHEEP.

3. These Lambs, for some Months, while they were sucking their Dams, must have their Fleeces of the common Natural Colour; and till they were wean'd, and browsed upon the *Sandyx*, cou'd have no adventitious Dye: Which is a Supposition unworthy of *Virgil*.

4. Supposing the Juice of the *Sandyx* dy'd their Fleeces; yet *PASCENTES* is ignorantly put here: For the Tincture must be acquired, not only while they are FEEDING, but also afterwards, when the Nourishment is distributed thro' the Body, in Rest and in Sleep.

5. The whole Notion of that Aliment dying the Fleeces of Lambs is very foolish; for the Grass, which is the greatest Part of their Food, wou'd more probably die the Fleeces Green, than the *Sandyx* die them Scarlet. And when the Rams are died *Murice*, with Purple, must we suppose them to feed upon Shell-fish?

These Exceptions, and more that might be offer'd, will easily induce one to believe, that *Virgil* cou'd not so forget himself as to use here the word *PASCENTES*. We must try therefore to substitute another Word, that will make a Sense worthy of the Author, and plainly appear not to be a Thought lent him; but really his own.

'Tis plain that by *Murex*, *Lutius*, *Sandyx*, the Poet means some Colours, viz. Purple, Yellow, Scarlet, without considering the Materials they are naturally made of. For 'tis Nonsense that the real Blood of the *Murex*, *Purple-Fish*, shou'd come upon a Ram's Fleece in pratis; and therefore 'tis the same thing in the Poet's Design, whether *Sandyx* be a Plant or a Mineral.

" The Passage ought to be read thus, with
" the change of one Letter.

' Ipse sed in pratis aries jam suave rubenti
' Murice, jam croceo mutabit vellera luto:
' Sponte sua Sandyx NASCENTES vestiet agnos.

' In this Reading every thing is just and beautiful, and worthy of *Virgil*. After that time, says the Poet, there will be no need of dying Wool with beautiful Colours. Why so? The Sheep shall have their Fleeces died naturally and spontaneously, some of one Colour, some of another. Those that were already in Being, and had white Fleeces before, shall change them IN PRATIS. But all the LAMBS, that shall be generated afterwards, shall NASCENTES, at their very Birth, appear beautifully died. The Miracle will be constant and universal.

' No Body will doubt of the Truth of this Correction, (NASCENTES for PASCENIES,) who considers that other Verse of *Virgil*,

' Georg. III. 390. about Lambs, which nascentes take a Colour from their Sires.

' Illum autem, quamvis aries sit candidus ipse,
' Nigra subest udo tantum cui lingua palato,
' Ejice, ne maculis infuscet vellera pullis
' NASCENTUM

' Now that the Emendation is found, it will be wonder'd that the great *Pliny*, and XVI. Ages after him, cou'd be content with the vulgar Reading; and not be able to do Right to the Author. But 'tis to be observed, that the common Copies of *Virgil* were very early abused by Transcribers; as it frequently appears from what we read in *Aulus Gellius*, who lived but a little while after *Pliny*, in the Reign of *Hadrian*.

I make no doubt that the Readers wou'd be well pleased to find these *Memoirs* frequently adorn'd with such Ingenious and Learned Criticisms. Whenever I receive any thing of that Nature, or any other curious Piece, I shall carefully impart them to the Publick.

PARIS.

THE *Mercur*e Galant, which was publish'd Monthly by the late M. *Devizé* for the space of Thirty Years, is to be continued by M. *du Fresny*, Valet de Chambre to the King. He has already put out the first Volume for June, July, and August; the Second, for September and October will come out in the beginning of November; and then each *Mercur*e will constantly appear every Month. M. *du Fresny* is the Author of the *Amusements Serious and Comical*. He says in his Preface to the *Mercur*e, that the King, who can cast his Eyes upon the most Inconsiderable Things, without neglecting the most Important, has been often pleased to peruse his Works for his Diversion. He has presented a Petition in Verse to the King for a License, which has been granted him. That Petition runs thus:

PLACET AU ROY.

Plaise au Roy, par Brevet, vouloir autoriser,
Le Privilege ancien que j'ay de l'amuser.
Plaise à ma Muse aussi d'être badine & sage.
Plaise à moy, me bornant au prudent badinage,
De ne pas ressembler à ces Foux sérieux,
Qui veulent penetrer jusqu' aux secrets des Dieux.
De louer sans flater, de blamer sans médire,
D'être libre sans m'oublier,
Point ridicule en faisant rire,
Et sérieux sans ennuyer.
En un mot plaise au Roy, que je tâche à luy plaire:
Mais sur tout plaise au Roy mon desir de bien faire.
Plaise au Roy mon *Mercur*e, & de là s'en suivra
Qu' aux gens de bon esprit mon *Mercur*e plaira.

M. *du Fresny* writes better, and is more Methodical than his Predecessor. As he was walking in the Groves of *Marly*, he took them for those of *Parnassus*: He fancied that he was *Mercury*; and that he saw *Apollo*. What pass'd between him and *Apollo* is ingeniously expressed in the following Verses:

MERCURE ET APOLLON.

DANS un Bois Apollon revoit profondement;
Sa Lyre sur son bras penchoit negligemment.
*Mercur*e la voit, la desire:
Il médite un larcin: quel en sera le fruit?
Il s'avance à petit bruit,
Voilà sa main sur la lyre.
Mais Apollon s'éveille, & lui prenant la main,
Arreste, quel est ton dessein?
Mon dessein? Je voulois chanter ce Roy si sage,
Ce Roy, dont les vertus font respecter les Loix.
Alors d'un air severe Apollon l'envisage:
Comment donc petit personnage,
Dit-il, c'est bien à toy d'attenter sur mes droits:
C'est bien à toy vraiment d'oser chanter les Rois.
Dieu des Marchands forains, va borner ton audace
A trafiquer tant bien que mal,
Faisant courir de place en place
Le Sonnet & le Madrigal.
En fidele Marchand fais ton Livre Journal;
Sans tromper ni surfaire, ornes ta Marchandise;
Sois plaisant, si tu peux; si tu veux, moralise;
Sauve-toy par le Sérieux,
Lors que tu ne pourras mieux faire:
Ouy, l'on te permettra même d'être ennuyeux;
Tant pis pour toy, c'est ton affaire.
Mais si ton vol audacieux
Va jusqu' aux Rois ou jusqu' aux Dieux,
Et si tu prens l'essor en portant tes Nouvelles,
Le grand Dieu Jupiter te rognera les ailes.
Par ce ton menaçant *Mercur*e est allarmé,
Honteux, confus, il se démonte,
Et tâchant de cacher sa honte,
Abaisse sur les yeux son bonnet emplumé,
Tourne le dos, veut fuir; mais audace nouvelle,
Un redoublement de zele
Le fait encore insister.
Non, Apollon, dit-il, je ne puis résister,
Par quelques Vers il faut que je me satisfasse,
Le Roy m'a fait une grace,
Je puis sans temerité
Chanter au moins sa bonté.
Je dois par reconnaissance
Tais-toy, dit Apollon, le Respect, le Silence,
Sont les remerciemens qu'on exige de toy:
Faire du bien gratis, c'est le plaisir du Roy.

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